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Behind the Desk: How gender discrimination Impacts Women's Health in Workplace

Gundapu Manasa[1*], **Dr. Ujjala Singh**[2]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of Education & Education Technology, School of Social Sciences University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Telangana. Email: manasa.gundapu@gmail.com

[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Education & Education Technology, School of Social Sciences University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Telangana. Email: ujjala.singh@uohyd.ac.in

[*]*Corresponding Author: Dr. Ujjala Singh (ujjala.singh14@gmail.com)*

Abstract

Gender discrimination significantly affects women's mental and physical health, particularly at work. This study examines how gender discrimination impacts women's health, focusing on employment-related experiences among female government employees in the education sector in India. Discrimination appears as unequal workload, pay gaps, limited career advancement, opportunities and sexual harassment. These issues lead to psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, burnout, and posttraumatic stress. Unstructured interviews were conducted using purposive sampling technique with 12 female employees from Government teacher Education colleges in Warangal district, and the results stated that they are facing gender discrimination related to their workload. The findings show that such discrimination increases stress levels; harms mental health, and reduces job satisfaction. The existing literature backs these findings, showing systemic gender biases and their link to poor health outcomes. This study emphasizes the urgent need for workplace reforms that consider gender and health support systems to reduce these effects and promote fairness. Recommendations include policy changes to improve workload distribution, anti-discrimination training, and targeted mental health resources for women employees. This research highlights the broader implications of gender discrimination beyond work, affecting women's overall well-being and social fairness.

Keywords: *Gender discrimination, women's health, mental health, employment, inequality, workplace discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality means that all people have the same rights, opportunities, access to resources, decision-making, employment and services (UNSDG 2025). It involves eliminating unfair practices that treat people differently based on gender and ensures that the needs, interests, and aspirations of both men and women are valued equally. Societies with gender equality guarantee equal representation and participation for all genders. The United Nations (2025) stated that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. The Constitution of India has provided its citizens with several provisions to eradicate the gender inequality, some of which include Article 14, which guarantees equality before the law and Article 15 which prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. Additionally, Article 15(3) provides special provisions in favour of women and children. Likewise, Article 16 addresses equality of opportunity in public employment and Article 39(d) ensures

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equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Together, these articles ensure that women receive equal treatment under the law while enabling affirmative action to address the issues they face. Despite constitutional guarantees and legislative measures promoting gender equality, women continue to face obstacles in various areas, including pay equity, employment, leadership access, harassment, and balancing work and life **(Raj, Johns, & Jose, 2020**; **Folke & Rickne, 2022)**. If this inequality is removed, then it will be possible to provide a safe and secure place for the women. Achieving equality could increase India's GDP by 16% to 60% by 2025 if women are given equal opportunities for economic participation (MGI, 2015). Achieving gender equality is important for attaining social justice, reducing poverty, and supporting sustainable development (UNSDG, 2025). It fosters innovation, increases productivity, and contributes to better economic and social outcomes for everyone. With this, the workplace plays an important role in women's lives as many women are working nowadays. In the workplace, gender equality fosters healthier and more productive environments as well as improves well-being for all employees, particularly women. It is a major obstacle to development and is deeply intertwined with social structures, institutional policies and cultural norms. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, 2025 (WEFGGGR), indicates that globally, 68.8% of the gender gap has been closed, indicating progress but showing that full parity remains 123 years away. While countries like Iceland (92.6%) and Finland (87.9%) lead globally, disparities persist in regions such as South Asia, fuelled by unequal access to economic opportunities and political representation. In India, the situation reflects both progress and persistent inequality. India ranks 131st out of 148 countries on the *Global Gender Gap Index 2025* and has achieved 64.1% gender parity. The country performs strongly in educational attainment (97.1%) but lags behind in political empowerment and economic participation.

Issues related to gender inequality include economic loss where limited wage gaps and limited participation of women in the economy restrict growth and innovation, health disparities, discriminatory laws and weak enforcement hinder women's progress, workplace stress and psychological distress. The *UNDP Gender Inequality Index 2025* highlights persistent disparities in reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation, with India's index standing at 0.437, ranking 108th globally. These inequalities impact women's holistic health, particularly within patriarchal social structures that influence their roles, opportunities, and representation. Working women face multiple challenges, such as balancing job demands with household responsibilities, unequal career advancement opportunities, and social and cultural expectations to prioritise family over work. Women often shoulder greater responsibilities at home, from childcare to household duties. In addition to professional commitments. This burden leads to increased stress and potential health issues, especially when workplace support for family responsibilities is inadequate. At work, discrimination manifests in multiple forms, including unequal pay, excessive workload, lack of authority, exclusion from decision-making, restricted promotions, and sexual or emotional harassment (**Channar, Abbassi & Ujan, 2011; Hackett et al., 2024; Stamarski & Hing., 2015)**. These inequities lead to stress, burnout, and adverse health outcomes, including anxiety and depression **(Vigod & Rochon, 2020)**. Sociocultural biases reinforce occupational segregation, which keeping women concentrated in low-paying and less secure jobs **(Pennington, Maudsley & Whitehead, 2023); Health Department of Australia, 2025)**. This discriminatory treatment based on gender, often putting women at a disadvantage in social, economic, and professional areas, has an impact on their health. Women's health encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being. The balance among these areas is important for the overall well-being of women and their health, but harmful practices at work can worsen health conditions. This study examines the impact of workplace on women's health, focusing on discrimination related to workload.

In this context, **Alvarez et al. (2025)** examined gender-specific stress in teachers and found that women educators have higher levels of perceived stress, anxiety, burnout and physiological indicators of distress compared to their male counterparts, linking gender-based inequities to health, problems in academic environments**. Hackett et al. (2024)** examined young women's views on gender discrimination

and documented its negative impact on mental health, including increased anxiety and decreased satisfaction with life. This study reinforced the impact of discrimination on individuals beyond the workplace. Likewise, **Hennein Poulin, Gorman, Lowe (2023)** studied gender discrimination among healthcare workers and found a strong link between experiences of discrimination and higher rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout in women. Their research showed how gender bias negatively affects mental health in the workplace. This discrimination not only creates stress among women employees also effects on their survival rates. In this regard, **Pennington, Maudsley, Whitehead (2023)** provided demographic evidence showing that severe gender discrimination negatively affects women's survival rates and health outcomes, highlighting the connection between gender inequality and public health. **Pinho, Freitas, Patrao & Aquino (2024)** analysed occupational stress and gender disparities among higher education teachers and concluded that women are disproportionately affected by mental health problems such as depression and emotional exhaustion, often linked to institutional discrimination and reduced support. The workplace discrimination also causes depression in women, and **Johansson, Falkstedt & Almroth (2022)** in their study found that depression among teachers was significantly affected by gender, with female teachers experiencing higher mental health burdens owing to workplace discrimination. Sometimes it also affects long-term health issues, such as stress-related disorders and cardiovascular risks for women and **Stamarski and Son Hing (2015)** stated that it happens due to gender inequalities. With increasing health issues, discrimination also impacts the regularity among the employees. In this connection, **Ali, Kumari, & Singh (2021)** surveyed female professionals in STEM fields and reported that persistent gender discrimination resulted in increased stress rates, reduced motivation, and higher absenteeism, indicating that gender bias has substantial consequences for women's professional and psychological health.

Gender discrimination and stress impacts on job satisfaction among women employees and **Channar, Abbassi & Ujan (2011)** focused on this and also concluded that unfair practices in the workplace harm women's emotional well-being and performance. If the employee faces any gender discrimination in the workplace and not feel comfortable in the workplace, then it really creates stress and impacts on the mental health of women employees, and in this regard, **Vigod, & Rochon (2020)** in their study, highlighted that there is a need for mental health support in the workplace.

From the above literature review, it can be stated that gender discrimination plays a vital role that impacts women's health by affecting their mental and physical health in the workplace. These findings provide a strong foundation for exploring how gender discrimination impacts women employed in the government education sector.

Most of the researches have been examined gender discrimination across various sectors, such as healthcare, public and private sectors, limited studies have focused specifically on workplace discrimination among female employees in the government education sector. Most existing literature explores healthcare, corporate, or general labour sectors, leaving a gap in understanding how institutions function and how gender role expectations in education impact female employees' physical and mental health. This study fills the gap by exploring experiences of discrimination among female employees in government B.Ed. and D.Ed. colleges in Warangal district and examined its health implications.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the intersection between gender inequality and women's health within a specific sector (Government) and geographic context. By understanding how workplace discrimination affects the physical and mental well-being of female employees working in Government Teacher Education colleges, this research contributes to the formulation of policies promoting gender-equitable work cultures. Furthermore, it supports Sustainable Development Goal 5 - achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls - by providing empirical insights that can inform the design of targeted interventions, workplace reforms, and mental health support systems.

Research Question:

Based on the literature review and the gap found, the following research questions are framed:

1. What kind of gender discrimination is faced by working women in the Government institutions?
2. How does gender discrimination affect the health of working women?

OBJECTIVES

Based on the research questions, two objectives were framed.

1. To examine the specific kinds of gender discrimination experienced by working women in their workplace.
2. To find out the impact of workplace gender discrimination on the health of working women.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the nature of the objectives framed, a qualitative research paradigm was selected for the present study.

Population: All female employees working in Government Teacher Education colleges in Warangal district were considered the population of the study, comprising 20 female employees.

Sample and sampling technique: From the population, 12 samples were selected using a purposive sampling technique.

Tool: To collect the required data, the researcher used unstructured interviews. Each interview lasted 15-20 minutes, and all responses were recorded and written by the researcher.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis and interpretation of objective 1:

The first objective of the study is **to examine the specific kinds of gender discrimination experienced by working women in their workplace.**

To analyse this objective, interviews were conducted with the sample, and % analysis was performed based on their responses. The responses are shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: Gender discrimination faced by working women

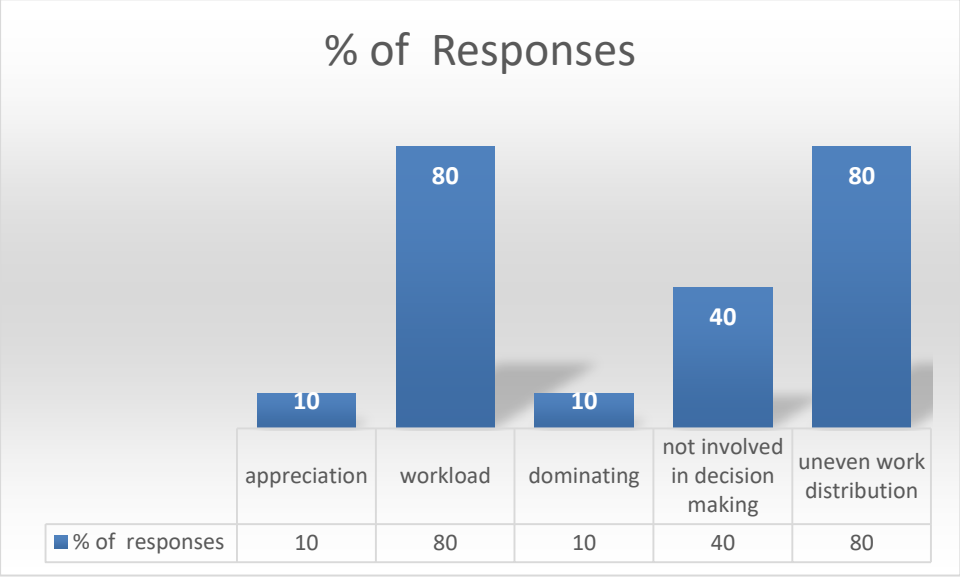

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of responses highlighting the key problems women face in the workplace. A large majority of respondents (80%) identified workload and uneven work distribution as major issues, indicating an imbalance in task allocation in the institution. Such findings indicate that employees feel overburdened and perceive inequality in sharing responsibilities. Tiwari, Mathur & Awasthi (2018) also found the existence of gender discrimination in the workplace and giving extra workload to the women employees.

Additionally, 40% of respondents reported that they are not involved in decision-making, which reflects women's lack of participation in management. Women feel that they were not given enough importance in decision-making and that their opinions were not valued by male employees. (Poorna & Parasuram, 2024) in their study, they mentioned that women face difficulty in their promotion, although they have proper qualifications.

With this, the lack of appreciation and dominating behaviour of the male colleagues is another issue faced by women employees. 10% of respondents pointed out that they are not appreciated for the work they have done, and also noted that male employees tend to dominate over female employees. Poorna & Parasuram (2024) also found that the women are not appreciated for their work.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that structural and procedural issues are significant, and a significant majority of women employees reported gender-based discrimination primarily related to uneven work distribution and work load inequality.

Analysis and interpretation of objective 2:

The second objective of the study was **to determine the impact of gender discrimination on the health of working women.** From their interviews, the researcher identified the impact of different kinds of gender discrimination faced by the working women which were shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Impact of gender discrimination on working women health

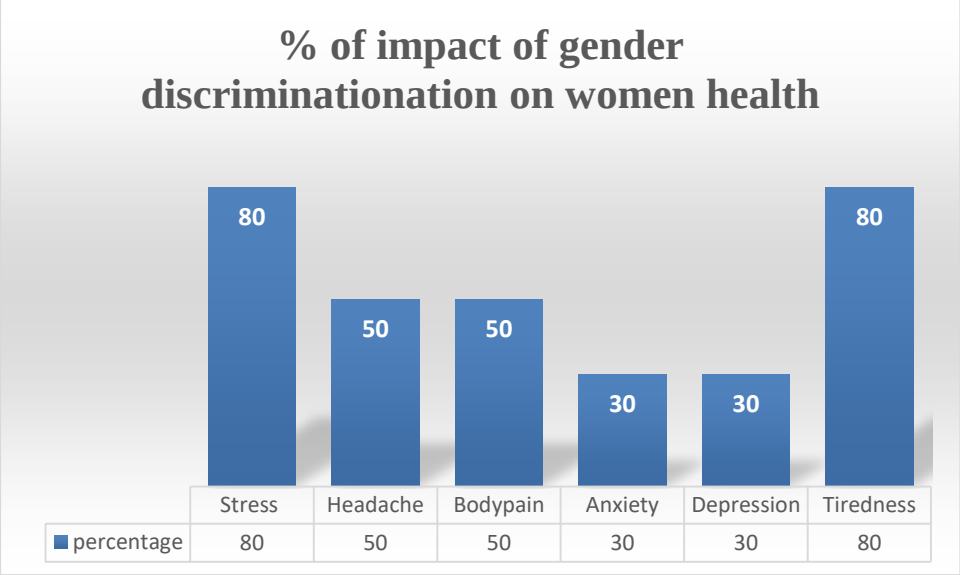

Figure 2 represents the percentage-wise impact of gender discrimination on women's health, highlighting a range of psychological and physical consequences reported in the study.

The most significant effects are stress (80%) and tiredness (80%), which indicates that discriminatory experiences place a heavy emotional and psychological burden on women. Pinho, Freitas, Patrao & Aquino (2024) and Ali, Kumari & Singh (2021**)** also stated that stress is a result of gender discrimination in the workplace. Tiredness is also linked with emotional exhaustion, which reduces the energy level and, as a result, employees feel stress mentioned by (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014).

Headache (50%) and body pain (50%) are other impacts of gender discrimination reported in the study. Also, they trouble from anxiety (30%) and depression (30%) as well. Johansson, falkstedt & Almroth **(**2022), Vigod & Rochon (2020) & Pinho, Freitas, Patrao & Aquino (2024) also support the finding

DISCUSSION

The above analysis revealed that the majority of women employees reported experiencing gender discrimination and unequal workload distribution. Many women highlighted feeling burdened with heavier workloads than to their male colleagues, causing increased work-related stress and feelings of unfair treatment and neglect. This imbalance creates a sense of inequality that impacts their motivation and job satisfaction. Furthermore, many linked this discrimination to negative mental health outcomes, such as stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and emotional exhaustion, and lowered levels of job satisfaction. These findings are reinforced by literature review studies indicating that gender discrimination correlates with higher symptoms of posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout among working women.

Women also shared experiences of limited career progression opportunities and subtle exclusion from decision-making processes, which compounded their psychological distress. These discriminatory practices result in not only adverse mental health effects but also reduced overall well-being and professional efficacy. The study highlights the systemic nature of gender bias that permeates institutional policies and workplace culture, adversely affecting women's health outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Gender discrimination in the workplace, particularly related to workload inequality, greatly affects women's mental and physical health. This discrimination manifests as excessive workloads, unequal career advancement, inequality in work distribution, all leading to psychological distress such as anxiety, depression and burnout. The study aligns with broader research emphasizing that gender biases in workplaces contribute substantially to negative health outcomes for women. Gender discrimination is not only a social justice issue but also a critical public health concern. It demands Policy reforms that focus on fair workload distribution, awareness programs, and mental health support are essential to address these problems. Employers should create inclusive environments to advance gender equity and improve women's health.

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